

The
Seconde
Nonnes
Tale

Thou confort of us wrecches, do me endite
Thy maydens deeth, that wan thurgh hire merite
The eterneel lyf, and of the feend victorie,
As man may after reden in hire storie.

Thow mayde and mooder, doghter of thy sone,
Thow welle of mercy, synful soules cure,
In whom that God, for bountee, chees to wone,
Thow humble, and heigh over every creature,
Thow nobledest so ferforth oure nature,
That no desdeyn the Makere hadde of kynde,
His sone in blood and flessch to clothe and wynde.

Withinne the cloistre blisful of thy sydis
Took mannes shap the eterneel love and pees,
That of the tryne compas lord and gyde is,
Whom erthe, and see, and hevене, out of reles,
Hy heryen; and thou, virgine wemmelees,
Baar of thy body, and dweltest mayden pure,
The creatour of every creature.

Assembled is in thee magnificence,
With mercy, goodnesse, and with swich pitee,
That thou, that art the sonne of excellence,
Nat oonly helpst hem that preyen thee,
But often tyme, of thy benygnytee,
ful frely, er that men thyn help biseche,
Thou goost biforn, and art hir lyves leche.

NOw help, thow meeke and blisful faire
mayde,
Me, flemed wrecche, in this desert of galle;
Thynk on the womman Cananee, that sayde
That whelpes eten somme of the crommes alle
That from hir lordes table been yfalle;
And though that I, unworthy sone of Eve,
Be synful, yet accepte my bileve.

And, for that feith is deed withouten werkis,
So for to werken yif me wit and space,
That I be quit fro thennes that moost derk is.
O thou, that art so fair and ful of grace,
Be myn advocat in that heighe place
Theras withouten ende is songe Osanne,
Thow Cristes mooder, doghter deere of Anne!

And of thy light my soule in prison lighte,
That troubled is by the contagioun
Of my body, and also by the wighte
Of erthely lust and fals affeccioun;
O havene of refut, O salvacioun
Of hem that been in sorwe and in distresse,
Now help, for to my werk I wol me dresse!

Yet preye I yow that reden that I write,
foryeve me, that I do no diligence
This ilke storie subtilly to endite;
for bothe have I the wordes and sentence
Of hym that at the seintes reverence
The storie wroot, and folwen hire legende,
I pray yow that ye wole my werk amende.

*Interpretacio nominis Cecilie, quam ponit frater
Jacobus Januensis in Legenda Aurea.*

FIRST wolde I yow the name of
Seinte Cecilie
Expowne, as men may in hir
storie see,
It is to seye in English hevenes
lilie,

for pure chaastnesse of virginitee;
Or, for she whitenesse hadde of honestee,
And grene of conscience, and of good fame
The soote savour, Lilie was hir name;

Or Cecilie is to seye The wey to blynde,
for she ensample was by good techynge;
Or elles Cecilie, as I writen fynde,
Is joyned, by a manere conjoynynge
Of hevene and Lia, and heere, in figurynge,
The hevene is set for thought of hoolynesse,
And Lia for hire lastynge bisynesse.

Cecilie may eek be seyde in this manere;
Wantynge of blyndnesse, for hir grete light
Of sapience, and for hire thewes cleere;
Or elles, loo! this maydens name bright
Of hevene and Leos comth, for which by right
Men myghte hire wel, The hevene of peple, calle,
Ensamble of goode and wise werkis alle.

for, Leos, Peple in English is to seye,
And right as men may in the hevene see
The sonne and moone and sterres every weye,
Right so men goostly, in this mayden free,
Seven of feith the magnanymytee,
And eek the cleernesse hool of sapience,
And sondry werkis, brighte of excellence.

And right so as thise philosophres write
That hevene is swift and round & eek brennyng,
Right so was faire Cecilie the white
ful swift and bisy evere in good werkynge,
And round and hool in good perseveryng,
And brennyng evere in charite ful brighte;
Now have I yow declared what she highte.
Explicit.

HEERE BIGYNNETH THE SECONDE NONNES TALE OF THE
LYF OF SEINTE CECILE

THIS mayden bright
Cecile, as hir lif seith,
Was comen of Ro-
mayns, & of noble kynde,
And from hir cradel up
fostred in the feith
Of Crist, and bar his
gospel in hir mynde;
She nevere cessed, as I
writen fynde,
Of hir preyere, and God to love and drede,
Bisekyng hym to kepe hir maydenhede.

And whan this mayden sholde unto a man
Ywedded be, that was ful yong of age,
Which that ycleped was Valerian,
And day was comen of hir mariage,
She, ful devout and humble in hire corage,
Under hir robe of gold, that sat ful faire,
Hadde next hire flessch yclad hire in an haire.

And whil the orgues maden melodie,
To God alone in herte thus sang she:
O Lord, my soule and eek my body gye
Unwemmed, lest that I confounded be:
And, for his love that deyde upon a tree,
Every seconde or thridde day she faste,
Hy biddynge in hire orisons ful faste.

The nyght cam, and to bedde moste she gon
With hire housbonde, as ofte is the manere,
And pryvely to hym she seyde anon,
O sweete and wel/biloved spouse deere,
Ther is a conseil, and ye wolde it heere,
Which that right fayn I wolde unto yow seye,
So that ye swere ye shul me nat biwreye.

Valerian gan faste unto hire swere
That for no cas, ne thyng that myghte be,
He sholde neveremo biwreyn here;
And thanne at erst to hym thus seyde she:
I have an aungel which that loveth me,
That with greet love, wherso I wake or
sleepe,
Is redy ay my body for to kepe.

And if that he may feelen, out of drede,
That ye me touche or love in vileynye,
He right anon wol sle yow with the dede,
And in youre yowthe thus ye sholden dye;
And if that ye in elene love me gye,
He wol yow loven as me, for youre clenness,
And shewen yow his joye and his brightnesse.

Valerian, corrected as God wolde,
Answerde agayn, If I shal trusten thee
Lat me that aungel se, and hym biholde;
And if that it a verray angel bee,
Thanne wol I doon as thou hast prayed me;

And if thou love another man, forsothe,
Right with this swerd thanne wol I sle yow
bothe.

CECILE answerde anon right in this
wise:
If that yow list, the angel shul ye see,
So that ye trowe on Crist, and yow baptize.
Gooth forth to Via Apia, quod shee,
That fro this toun ne stant but miles three,
And, to the povre folkes that ther dwelle
Sey hem right thus, as that I shal yow telle.

Tell hem that I, Cecilie, yow to hem sente,
To shewen yow the goode Urban the olde,
for secrete thynges, and for good entente.
And whan that ye Seint Urban han biholde,
Telle hym the wordes whiche I to yow tolde;
And whan that he hath purged yow fro synne,
Thanne shul ye se that angel, er ye twynne.

URBAN is to the place ygon,
And right as hym was taught by
his lernynge,
He foond this hooly olde Urban
anon,
Among the seintes buryeles
lotynge.

And he anon, withouten taryng,
Dide his message; and whan that he it tolde,
Urban for joye his handes gan upholde;

The teeris from his eyen leet he falle:
Almyghty Lord! O Jhesu Crist, quod he,
Sower of chast conseil, hierde of us alle,
The fruyt of thilke seed of chastitee
That thou hast sowe in Cecilie, taak to thee!
Lo, lyk a bisy bee, withouten gile,
Thee serveth ay thyn owene thral Cecilie!

for thilke spouse, that she took right now
ful lyk a fiers leoun, she sendeth heere,
As meke as evere was any lamb, to yow.
And with that word, anon ther gan appere
An oold man, clad in white clothes cleere,
That hadde a book with lettre of gold in
honde,
And gan biforn Valerian to stonde.

Valerian as deed fil down for drede
Whan he hym saugh, & he up hente hym tho,
And on his book right thus he gan to rede:
Oo Lord, oo feith, oo God, withouten mo;
Oo Cristendom, and fader of alle also,
Above alle, and over al everywhere,
Thise wordes al with gold ywriten were.

Whan this was rad, thanne seyde this olde
man,
Leevestow this thyng or no? Sey ye or nay.